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ABSTRACT

The latest contribution to the content standards boom that began in the 1990s comes from the American Psychological Association (APA), which recently published "National Standards for the Teaching of High School Psychology." This Digest discusses: (1) the origin and purposes of the project to develop standards for high school psychology courses; (2) the presentation and organization of the standards (five domains exemplify the usual content areas of psychology: the Methods Domain, Biopsychological Domain, Cognitive Domain, Developmental Domain, and the Sociocultural Domain); (3) teaching for active learning of psychology (featuring design principles to promote student learning); and (4) resources for psychology teachers (including internet sites and information on how to obtain a copy of the "National Standards for the Teaching of High School Psychology"). (LB)

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by

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Standards for the High School Psychology Course

By L. Lee Morganett

The latest contribution to the content standards boom that began in the 1990s comes from the American Psychological Association (APA), which recently published *National Standards for the Teaching of High School Psychology*. This Digest discusses (1) the origin and purposes of the project to develop standards for high school psychology courses, (2) the presentation and organization of the standards, (3) teaching for active learning of psychology, and (4) resources for psychology teachers.

Origin and Purposes of the Standards. The nationwide content standards movement plus the growing popularity of high school psychology courses (over 800,000 high school students annually enroll in psychology courses) prompted the American Psychological Association in 1995 to commission the Task Force for the Development of National High School Psychology Standards. The task force was composed of experienced psychologists and secondary and university psychology educators selected by the APA Education and Science directorates. The final product, *National Standards for the Teaching of High School Psychology*, was published in August 1999.

These standards are intended to help teachers improve the quality of teaching and learning in psychology courses. The standards are advisory only and will be used voluntarily by interested curriculum developers and teachers. Used appropriately, these new psychology standards can be a valuable tool to help both new and experienced high school psychology teachers become more effective in their teaching. People who make decisions about the teaching of psychology also will benefit from having a resource that provides an overall organization and approach for teaching psychology.

The standards for high school psychology stress student development of skills necessary for living in a rapidly changing world. The authors recommend that students learn to "think critically and synthesize large quantities of new information, show sensitivity to diversity, and develop attitudes and skills that promote lifelong learning" (APA 1999, 7).

Organization of the Standards. The following key terms are used in the presentation and organization of the psychology standards. *Domain* refers to a cluster of related content areas. A *Standard Area* pertains to a major topic or unit representing a subdivision of psychology. *Content Standard* refers to what students should comprehend after completing a specific unit in the psychology course. A *Performance Standard* refers to what students should be able to do in relation to the *Content Standard*. A *Performance Indicator* provides different ways students may demonstrate that they have achieved the standard. Using these five key terms we can examine how the task force organized the content of psychology for teaching purposes.

Five domains exemplify the usual content areas of psychology: the Methods Domain, Biopsychological Domain, Cognitive Domain, Developmental Domain, and the Sociocultural Domain. Within each Domain are specific Standard Areas, 15 across the five Domains. Each Standard Area comprises various Content Standards, 70 across the 15 Standard Areas. Each Content Standard is further divided into specific Performance Standards. Finally, each Performance Standard offers various possible performance indicators, ways students can demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of each Performance Standard.

The Performance Indicators are only suggestions. Teachers may develop their own Performance Indicators if they wish. For example, the Cognitive Domain includes the Standard Areas of learning, memory, thinking and language, and states of consciousness. Content Standards for the Standard Area of Learning pertain to characteristics of learning, principles of classical conditioning, principles of operant conditioning, components of cognitive learning, and roles of biology and culture in determining learning. Under the Content Standard category of characteristics of learning are the Performance Standards: discuss learning from a psychological viewpoint, and recognize learning as a vehicle to promote adaptation through experience. Four possible performance indicators are listed under this Performance Standard: Discuss learning from a psychological viewpoint. They are:

- Listing the important historical figures in learning.
- Defining learning as relatively permanent changes in behavior resulting from experience.
- Distinguishing learning from performance.
- Demonstrating the use of theories of learning in applied examples (APA 1999, 53).

This presentation and organization of the standards can help psychology teachers gain an overview or structure for teaching psychology and break down the teaching task into smaller, more manageable units and lessons.

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Teaching for Active Learning. To encourage students to become lifelong learners, the psychology standards stress teaching for active learning. The following design principles promote active learning.

1. Active learning should involve the entire class. For example, demonstrations that involve only a few students may constitute active learning for the students engaged in the activity, but not for the class as a whole.

2. Active learning is most effective when students understand the relevance of the exercise to the subject at hand, the content of their course work, or the students' everyday lives.

3. Active learning stimulates learning at higher cognitive levels. These methods not only require students to know and comprehend, they also prompt them to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate.

4. Active learning methods vary in the time they require in class and out of class. An instructor can design short activities for a few minutes of class time or design an entire course with active learning as the sole method.

5. Active learning exercises involve feedback to students, but not necessarily in the form of grades. Such feedback may come from the instructor or from other students in the class; either way it should be planned into the activity, ideally during or soon after the learning experience.

6. Active learning approaches must allow for student reluctance to participate. Teachers must respect students' right to privacy and not compel them to participate in activities that would have negative social consequences (APA 1999, 7-8).

Resources for Teachers. *National Standards for the Teaching of High School Psychology* includes suggested sample outlines for five-unit, seven-unit, and ten-unit psychology courses. A sample lesson plan format based on the organization provided in the Psychology Standards includes example lessons. Also, the *National Standards* reference list is a valuable resource for psychology teachers.

Section five of the book features a list of recommended popular books organized by the five domains. The section on technology discusses uses of computer software and the Internet. The section on the Internet addresses using electronic mail, electronic mailing lists or listservs, and the World Wide Web. Also included are Internet sites for psychology teachers as well as computer software and the names and addresses for obtaining the software.

The following Internet sites are recommended for secondary-level psychology teachers:

- American Psychological Association
  http://www.apa.org
- American Psychological Society
  http://psych.hanover.edu/aps
- Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology
  http://www.lemoyne.edu/otrp
- Society for the Teaching of Psychology
  http://teachpsych.lemoyne.edu/
- Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools
  http://www.apa.org/ed/topsshomepage.html

To obtain a copy of the *National Standards for the Teaching of High School Psychology*, contact the American Psychological Association, Sherrill Simons, Education Directorate, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002; 202-336-6076; e-mail address <ssimons@apa.org>. A copy of the standards can be obtained on the World Wide Web at <http://www.apa.org/ed/natlstandards.html>. Hard copies of the psychology standards are available at no cost by writing to Sherrill Simons at the address above.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

American Psychological Association. NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR THE TEACHING OF HIGH SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1999.

Johnson, David E., and Simone L. Schroder. "Annotated Bibliography on the Teaching of Psychology." TEACHING OF PSYCHOLOGY 25 (November 1998): 307-314. EJ 584 744.

Puente, Antonio E. TEACHING PSYCHOLOGY IN AMERICA: A HISTORY. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1992. ED 362 087.

Rileigh, Kathryn K. "Teaching Communication Skills in Psychology." TEACHING OF PSYCHOLOGY 25 (November 1998): 279-282. EJ 584 735.

Stomfay-Stitz, Aline M. EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY, AND SOCIAL SCIENCE. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (New York, NY, August 12, 1995). ED 407 307.

Wittrock, M. C. "Generative Teaching of Comprehension." ELEMENTARY SCHOOL JOURNAL 92 (November 1999): 169-184. EJ 438 170.

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